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TAGS: PGOV PREL BA POL

SUBJECT: MINOR RESHUFFLE BRINGS SOME NEW BLOOD INTO CABINET

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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¶11. (C) The new Cabinet announced by Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa December 11 brings in five new ministers, changes the portfolio of four existing ministers, and drops three others.

Of the 23 ministers, 11 are from the ruling Al Khalifa family with the remaining twelve evenly split between Sunnis and Shias. Five of six national security ministers are Al Khalifas as are two of six economy-related ministers. Four of the newcomers are well-known faces from their long experience in national affairs, with the only true outsider being Shia businessman Nizar Al Baharna, who was appointed Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. Most prominent among the portfolio shifts was former Minister of Defense General Shaikh Khalifa retaining his position of Deputy Commander-in-Chief and his seat in the Cabinet but losing his ministerial title to Minister of State for Defense Affairs Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Khalifa. The two women ministers from the previous cabinet retained their positions.

The reshuffle is relatively minor, notable mostly for the symbolism of the elevation of a Shia to deputy prime minister for the first time and the inclusion of an opposition society member in the Cabinet. End Summary.

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Minor Cabinet Reshuffle  
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¶12. (SBU) Following the constitutionally-mandated resignation of the Cabinet following the November 25/December 2 parliamentary elections, the King reappointed Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa to the position of prime minister and asked him to form a new government. Shaikh Khalifa announced the Cabinet December 11, appointing five new ministers, changing the portfolios of four existing ministers, and dropping three others. Of the 23 ministers (excluding three ministers related to Royal Court and Prime Minister Court affairs), 11 (48%) are from the Al Khalifa family, six are non-Al Khalifa Sunnis, and six are Shias. Five of six national security ministers (Deputy Commander of the Bahrain Defense Force (BDF), Minister of State for Defense Affairs, Minister of Interior, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs) are Al Khalifas. Two of six economy-related ministers (Electricity and Water, Industry and Commerce, Public Works and Housing, Finance, Labor, and Oil and Gas) are Al Khalifas.

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Old Wine in New Bottles  
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¶13. (SBU) Newcomers to the Cabinet are Deputy Prime Minister

(without portfolio) Jawad Al Arrayed, Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa, Minister of Municipalities and Agricultural Affairs Mansour Bin Rajab, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Nizar Al Baharna, and Minister of State for Defense Affairs Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Khalifa. (See bios in para 9.) Of these, four are familiar faces from their long experience in national affairs. Al Arrayed had previously served as Minister of Justice and Advisor to the Prime Minister for Legal Affairs and Bin Rajab had been a prominent member of the previous Shura Council. Both Shaikh Khalid and Shaikh Mohammed served as under secretaries in their ministries before being elevated to minister. The only minister who is truly new to government is Al Baharna, a well-known business man who had been elected and was serving as second vice president of the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

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Some Portfolio Shifts  
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¶4. (SBU) Those with changed portfolios are Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, General Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Minister of Information Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar, and Minister of Oil and Gas Affairs Abdul Hussein Ali Mirza. Shaikh Ali, the prime minister's son, had previously served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Transportation. He retains the deputy PM position, but accompanying the announcement of the new Cabinet was word that the Transportation Ministry would be transformed into a public authority. There was no indication of who would head the new authority. General Shaikh Khalifa had previously served as Minister of Defense and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the BDF; he will now serve in only the

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Deputy CINC capacity but remains a member of the Cabinet. Abdul Ghaffar held two portfolios in the previous Cabinet, Minister of Information and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. He now will hold only the information portfolio. Mirza had been Minister of State and Chairman of the National Oil and Gas Authority; he is now minister of the reconstituted oil and gas ministry. He had already been sitting in the office of the former minister of energy, a position that had been eliminated in last January's Cabinet reshuffle.

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Three Ministers Depart  
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¶5. (SBU) Three ministers were dropped from the previous Cabinet. They are former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Islamic Affairs Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalid Al Khalifa, an elderly man who openly has said he wanted to retire. Islamic Affairs has now been joined with Justice under Shaikh Khalid. Former Minister of Justice Mohammed Al Sitri has been appointed the King's advisor for legislative affairs with the rank of minister, although he is not a member of the Cabinet. Former Minister of Municipalities and Agricultural Affairs Ali Al Saleh was appointed to the Shura Council and is expected to serve as the chamber's chairman.

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Notable Elements of New Cabinet  
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¶6. (C) The appointment of Al Arrayed as deputy PM represents the most senior level reached by a Shia in the government. Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Shaikh Ahmed bin Attiyatallah Al Khalifa, who was accused of running a wide-ranging conspiracy to sway outcomes in the recent parliamentary elections in a report written by former advisor Salah Al Bandar, remains in his position despite the accusations and widespread (but not universal) public disgust for his alleged activities. Minister of State for Foreign

Affairs Al Baharna is the first member of an opposition society to be appointed to the Cabinet. Al Baharna is a member of leading Shia opposition political society Al Wifaq, which holds the largest single bloc of deputies in the elected lower house of parliament. Al Baharna comes from the most moderate and open-minded wing of Al Wifaq. The two women from the previous Cabinet, Minister of Health Nada Haffadh and Minister of Social Development Fatima Al Baloushi, remain in their positions.

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Comment  
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¶7. (C) The Cabinet reshuffle is relatively minor, notable mostly for the symbolism of the elevation of a Shia to deputy prime minister and inclusion of an opposition society member in the Cabinet, albeit in a position for which he has no background or experience. While one long-time official departed, Minister of Islamic Affairs Shaikh Abdullah, continuing a trend in recent Cabinet shake-ups, many observers had expected Minister of Defense Shaikh Khalifa to leave as well. Although he is no longer Minister, he maintains a Cabinet seat and will overshadow his former deputy Shaikh Mohammed. The biggest question hanging over Bahraini politics remains: When will the prime minister leave? The reshuffle did nothing to resolve this question.  
End Comment.

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Cabinet List  
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¶8. (U) Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa  
Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa  
Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa  
Deputy Prime Minister Jawad Al Arrayed  
Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Bahrain Defense Force Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa  
Minister of Education Dr. Majid Al Nuaimi  
Minister of Electricity and Water Shaikh Abdullah bin Salman Al Khalifa  
Minister of Finance Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Khalifa  
Minister of Foreign Affairs Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Khalifa  
Minister of Health Dr. Nada Haffadh  
Minister of Housing and Public Works Fahmi Al Jowder  
Minister of Industry and Commerce Dr. Hassan Fakhro  
Minister of Information Dr. Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar  
Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa  
Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs Shaikh Khalid bin Ali

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Al Khalifa  
Minister of Labor Dr. Majeed Al Alawi  
Minister of Municipalities and Agricultural Affairs Mansour Bin Rajab  
Minister of Oil and Gas Affairs Dr. Abdul Hussein Ali Mirza  
Minister of the Prime Minister's Court Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa  
Minister of Royal Court Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa  
Minister of Royal Court Affairs Shaikh Ali bin Isa Al Khalifa  
Minister of Social Development Dr. Fatima Al Baloushi  
Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Shaikh Ahmed bin Attiyatallah Al Khalifa  
Minister of State for Defense Affairs Dr. Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Khalifa  
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Nizar Al Baharna  
Minister of State for Shura Council and Parliament Affairs Abdul Aziz Al Fadhel

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Bios of New Cabinet members  
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¶9. (C) Deputy Prime Minister Jawad Al Arrayed (Shia): Born

in 1940, Al Arrayed received a degree in English literature from Cairo University and law degree from Leeds University in the UK. He served as a public prosecutor in 1969 before becoming Labor and Social Affairs Minister in 1971 and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs in 1973. He became Health Minister and Chairman of the Environmental Protection Committee in 1982 and Minister of State for Municipalities and Environmental Affairs in 1999. He was Minister of Justice 2002-2005. For the past year he has been an advisor to the prime minister for legal affairs. Al Arrayed led the GOB legal team at hearings into Bahrain's border dispute with Qatar at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. As Minister of Justice, Al Arrayed participated in a rule of law study tour in the United States for senior Bahraini officials and legislators that was organized by the Southern Methodist University in 2004.

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa (Royal Family, Sunni): In his mid-30s and the grandson of departing Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Abdullah, Shaikh Khalid studied law as an undergraduate in Egypt and received his Master's degree in legal studies from the University of Norwich in the UK. He worked in the Ministry of Justice as a prosecutor, judge, and head judge before being appointed under secretary in 2004. Shaikh Khalid is reform-minded and works very closely with the MEPI-funded American Bar Association advisor placed in the Ministry to promote the Rule of Law program.

Minister of Municipalities and Agricultural Affairs Mansour Bin Rajab (Shia): Born in 1951, Bin Rajab comes from one of the most prominent Shia families in Bahrain. He was a member of the Shura Council for six years and served as the Second Deputy Chairman since 2004. He is the Chairman of the General Committee for Husseini Matams (Shia community centers) and Vice President of the Jaafari (Shia) religious endowment board of directors. He is president of the Al Ahad Journalism Company and owner of the weekly newspaper Al Ahad.

Minister of State for Defense Affairs Dr. Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Khalifa (Royal Family, Sunni): A medical doctor, Shaikh Mohammed served as Under Secretary of the Ministry of Defense for four years, from 2002. Prior to that he was head of the heart center at the BDF Hospital. Shaikh Mohammed served several times as the head of the Bahraini delegation at U.S.-Bahrain joint meetings. Shaikh Mohammed would fill in for the Minister when the Minister was outside the country but he did not have the authority to make policy decisions in the Minister's absence. BDF contacts have told Emboffs that Shaikh Mohammed's elevation to Minister of State will increase his influence and improve his ability to interact with other ministers. Still, he is not expected to be a strong player in the government.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Nizar Al Baharna (Shia): Al Baharna studied engineering at the then-Aramco University in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. He is CEO of Nizar Consulting, part of the Al Baharna Holding Group, and CEO of Technologies and Consulting Group - Middle East, which was selected as one of the top five e-government solution providers by the World Summit on the Information Society. Al Baharna was elected second vice president of the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2005. He was a founding member of the Shia Al Wifaq society but left the board in 2004 to protest what he viewed as the society's growing intolerance. He rejoined Al Wifaq in 2005 and is viewed as one of the group's leading moderates and technocrats, particularly on economic and business affairs.

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